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PUBLIC STATEMENT

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND REHABILITATION OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has a profound impact on the lives, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities worldwide. As a professional organisation representing over 550,000 occupational therapists around the world, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) recognises the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for how people engage in their daily activities and occupations as result of disruptive changes in community access, resource availability and individual health and well-being. Populations around the world have been required to adjust and make compensations to usual routines in order to participate in ongoing or newly acquired occupations that are necessary for daily life.

Occupational therapy offers a broad variety of rehabilitation services to people of all ages, groups and communities affected by COVID-19 to enable their full inclusion in occupations in the home, education, work and leisure environment. Engagement in healthy occupations is needed to support survival, promote health and well-being and allow populations, communities, families and individuals to grow and flourish to realise their potential. Occupational therapists enable people to be active and productive in their community by using evidence-informed individual and population approach interventions, including skills training, education, group work and self-management strategies. Interventions reduce barriers impacting the mental, physical and cognitive health of people, their occupations and the environment in which they operate to promote meaningful lives where they live, love, work and play.

Research emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates a high need for occupational therapy rehabilitation intervention for people affected by COVID-19. Such individuals include those recovering from COVID-19 illness, particularly people with advanced age, multiple chronic diseases or organ failure (Brugliera, et al, 2020). People who require intensive care management of their symptoms face high risks of long-term physical, cognitive and emotional complications (British Psychological Association, 2020; Simpson, & Robinson, 2020). Rehabilitation is beneficial in the initial acute stage of COVID-19 management (Li, 2020; Yu, Wei, & He, 2020), as well in the long-term recovery phase for improving respiratory function, exercise endurance, performance of daily living activities and managing the psychological and cognitive sequelae of illness (Smith et al, 2020). Rehabilitation has also been identified as crucial for individuals affected by physical distancing measures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, including: persons experiencing an exacerbation of mental health conditions as result of social isolation; individuals becoming deconditioned because of prolonged immobilisation and musculoskeletal deterioration; and people at risk of functional regression due to pandemic

restrictions in rehabilitation services (Ceravolo, et al 2020). Given the need for rehabilitation from such broad-based populations, researchers are calling for action to prepare for an expected surge in demand for services (Stam, Stucki & Bickenbach, 2020).

WFOT acknowledges that many people do not have access to occupational therapy and advocates for equal opportunities to rehabilitation for people affected by COVID-19 as a human right. Occupational therapy has a substantial role in COVID-19 rehabilitation due to the profession's person-centred approach and expertise in the complex interaction of factors that enable occupational performance. Optimising occupational participation through the provision of occupational therapy provides a cost-effective opportunity to promote health, ensure social inclusion and advance individual and societal recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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